



Food, faith, and the stars: Exploring the relationship between astrology and Indian cuisine

Sudip Kumar Das¹, Parna Sen², Tanusri Patra³, Souvik Tewari^{4*}

¹ Department of Nutrition, Mahishadal Girls' College, West Bengal, India

² Senior Research Fellow, Dietitian, Central Council for Research, Homeopathy, New Delhi, India

³ Research Scholar, Department of Food and Nutrition, Swami Vivekananda University, Barrackpore, West Bengal, India

⁴ Assistant Professor, Department of Food and Nutrition, Swami Vivekananda University, Barrackpore, West Bengal, India

Corresponding Author: Souvik Tewari

Abstract

Food in India is not merely a source of nourishment; it is deeply embedded within religious practice, seasonal traditions, Ayurveda, social identity, ritual observance, and regional culture. Among the less systematically examined influences on Indian food practices is Jyotisha, or Indian astrology, in which celestial bodies (*grahas*), lunar cycles, weekdays, *nakshatras*, and auspicious timings may be connected with ritual actions and dietary choices. This review explores the conceptual relationship between astrology, faith, Ayurveda, and Indian cuisine, with particular attention to planetary food associations, *Navagraha* offerings, *Navadhanya* (nine sacred grains), fasting traditions, *sattvic–rajasic–tamasic* classifications, festival foods, and personalized dietary practices. Historical and cultural literature indicates that food-related rituals frequently operate through overlapping systems rather than through astrology alone. Ayurveda provides a framework based on *rasa* (taste), *guna*, *dosha*, digestive capacity, season, and individual constitution, while religious traditions determine fasting, food avoidance, offerings, and ritual purity. Astrological traditions may provide an additional symbolic framework linking particular foods, colours, grains, or offerings with planetary deities. However, these associations should be distinguished from scientifically established nutritional effects. Experimental investigations have not established reliable causal relationships between planetary positions and human personality or physiological outcomes. Therefore, the relationship between astrology and cuisine is best understood as a cultural, symbolic, and behavioral phenomenon, while the nutritional value of individual foods should be evaluated using contemporary food science and nutrition evidence. Understanding this intersection may contribute to interdisciplinary research in food anthropology, traditional knowledge, nutrition, gastronomy, and cultural heritage.

Keywords: Indian cuisine, astrology, Jyotisha, Navagraha, Ayurveda, food culture, fasting, Navadhanya, sattvic diet, religious food practices, traditional knowledge

Introduction

Indian cuisine represents one of the world's most diverse culinary systems, shaped by geography, climate, agriculture, religion, social identity, and regional cultural practices. Dietary patterns in India vary considerably across regions and communities, reflecting differences in local food availability, agricultural practices, religion, and social organization (Green *et al.*, 2016) [9]. Food practices in India frequently extend beyond the biological requirement for nutrients and become expressions of identity, spirituality, hospitality, social belonging, ritual purity, and relationships with nature. Historical evidence indicates that Indian dietary practices have developed through long-standing interactions among food availability, religious customs, medicinal traditions, seasonal conditions, and cultural beliefs (Srinivasan & Nair, 2020) [27]. Traditional Indian and Ayurvedic food systems have also emphasized the relationship between dietary practices, health, seasonality, and individual well-being (Kumar *et al.*, 2015) [11]. Within this cultural landscape, Jyotisha, commonly referred to as Indian astrology, represents a traditional knowledge system concerned with celestial bodies, calendrical calculations, auspicious timing, and divinatory interpretation. The *Navagraha*—Surya (Sun), Chandra (Moon), Mangala (Mars), Budha (Mercury), Brihaspati or Guru (Jupiter), Shukra (Venus), Shani (Saturn), Rahu, and Ketu—occupy an important position within Hindu ritual and

cosmological traditions. Scholarly studies of Hindu ritual have documented the historical and ritual significance of the *Navagraha*, while research on Hindu practice has shown that planetary symbolism can be incorporated into worship, vows, auspicious timing, and other religious activities (Bühnenmann, 1989; Markel, 1989; Warrier, 2020) [3, 12, 31]. In popular religious practice, particular grains, colours, flowers, food substances, and other offerings may be symbolically associated with specific *grahas*. One example is *Navadhanya*, a traditional group of nine grains that is associated in some Hindu ritual traditions with the nine *Navagraha*. The precise grains and their planetary correspondences, however, can vary across regional and ritual traditions and should therefore not be presented as a universally standardized classification. The use of grains in ritual contexts illustrates how agricultural products can acquire meanings extending beyond their nutritional functions, becoming symbols within systems of worship, ritual exchange, and cultural communication (Bühnenmann, 1989; Markel, 1989) [12]. The relationship between astrology and food should nevertheless be approached carefully. Astrological dietary recommendations are primarily situated within traditional belief systems and should not automatically be interpreted as scientifically validated nutritional prescriptions. Although astrology has historically played an important cultural and religious role in many societies, controlled scientific testing

has not established reliable evidence that astrological configurations can accurately predict individual characteristics or outcomes. For example, Carlson (1985)^[4] conducted two double-blind tests of astrological natal-chart claims and reported results inconsistent with the tested predictive claims of astrology. Therefore, the value of studying food astrology lies less in demonstrating planetary causation of nutritional or physiological effects and more in understanding how celestial symbolism, religious belief, ritual practice, and cultural traditions may influence food selection, fasting, offerings, identity, and culinary behaviour. This perspective allows astrology to be examined as a cultural and behavioural determinant of food practices, while nutritional and physiological claims remain subject to evidence-based food and nutrition science.

This review therefore examines the relationship among food, faith, astrology, Ayurveda, and Indian culinary heritage, while maintaining a distinction between cultural significance and scientific evidence.

Conceptual Foundations of Food, Faith and Astrology in India

The Indian food system can be viewed as the intersection of several knowledge traditions:

1. **Food and nutrition:** concerned with energy, nutrients, health, and physiological requirements.
2. **Ayurveda:** concerned with food qualities, digestion, constitution, *dosha*, *rasa*, seasonality, and balance.
3. **Religion and ritual:** concerned with purity, fasting, offerings, festivals, sacred foods, and prohibited foods.
4. **Jyotisha:** concerned with planetary symbolism, lunar calendars, auspicious timing, and ritual remedies.
5. **Regional culture:** concerned with local crops, culinary techniques, climate, ecology, and community identity.

Indian food traditions cannot be understood through nutrition alone because food practices have historically developed at the intersection of medicine, religion, ritual, ecology, agriculture, and cultural values. In the Indian context, dietary practices have been influenced by seasonal availability, religious observances, concepts of purity and impurity, medicinal traditions, and locally available agricultural resources. Ayurvedic dietary knowledge, in particular, considers food not only in terms of nourishment but also according to qualities, taste (*rasa*), digestive capacity, seasonality, and its perceived effects on health and well-being (Kumar *et al.*, 2015; Dhanya *et al.*, 2019)^[5, 11]. Similarly, food-related rituals may prescribe or restrict particular foods during religious festivals, fasting periods, life-cycle ceremonies, and specific social circumstances, demonstrating that dietary behavior can carry both nutritional and symbolic meanings (Srinivasan & Nair, 2020)^[27].

Consequently, a single food can possess multiple meanings within Indian culture. Rice, for example, functions as an important staple cereal and carbohydrate source in many Indian diets, while also occupying a significant position within traditional food systems and ritual practices. Depending on the cultural context, rice may be consumed as an everyday staple, incorporated into Ayurvedic dietary practices, prepared as a festival food, offered during religious ceremonies, or used symbolically in rituals associated with prosperity, fertility, purity, and auspiciousness (Srinivasan & Nair, 2020; Dhanya *et al.*,

2019)^[5, 27]. This multidimensional character demonstrates that food in India operates simultaneously as nourishment, medicine, ritual substance, agricultural product, cultural symbol, and social expression.

Jyotisha and the Symbolic Language of Food

1. The Navagraha Concept

In Indian astrological and Hindu ritual traditions, the Navagraha refers to nine celestial entities: Surya (Sun), Chandra (Moon), Mangala (Mars), Budha (Mercury), Brihaspati or Guru (Jupiter), Shukra (Venus), Shani (Saturn), and the lunar nodes Rahu and Ketu. These entities have historically occupied an important position in Indian religious and cosmological traditions, with evidence of planetary veneration extending back to early Indian traditions and later developing into more formalized ritual and iconographic systems (Bühnenmann, 1989; Markel, 1989)^[12].

Food becomes connected with the *Navagraha* primarily through ritual offerings, symbolic correspondences, and religious practices rather than through established nutritional mechanisms. One prominent example is Navadhanya, a term generally translated as “nine grains.” In contemporary Hindu ritual practice, Navadhanya may refer to a set of nine grains or legumes symbolically associated with the nine *grahas*. Commonly described examples include wheat, rice/paddy, chickpea, green gram, Bengal gram, beans, sesame, black gram, and horse gram. These grains may be used in *puja*, *homa* (fire ritual), *daan* (ritual donation), and other ceremonies associated with the *Navagraha* (Bühnenmann, 1989)^[3]. Contemporary ritual descriptions also document the use of Navadhanya as a medium through which the planetary deities are ritually represented or invoked.

The association between particular grains and individual *grahas* is not completely uniform across all Hindu traditions. For example, commonly reported correspondences associate wheat with Surya, rice or paddy with Chandra, chickpea with Mangala, green gram with Budha, Bengal gram with Brihaspati, white beans with Shukra, black sesame with Shani, black gram with Rahu, and horse gram with Ketu; however, alternative regional lists may substitute particular pulses or beans. Therefore, Navadhanya should be understood primarily as a ritual and cultural classification rather than a universally standardized nutritional or astrological taxonomy. Its significance lies in the way ordinary agricultural commodities are transformed into ritual symbols, linking food production, religious practice, cosmological ideas, and cultural identity. This distinction is particularly important in scholarly writing because the symbolic association between a grain and a *graha* should not be presented as evidence that the celestial body has a demonstrated physiological or nutritional effect on that food or on individuals who consume it.

2. Planetary Associations with Food

Traditional astrological practice frequently connects planetary symbolism with:

- Food color,
- Grains and pulses,
- Spices,
- Fruits,
- Sweets,
- Dairy products,
- Oils and seeds,
- Ritual offerings,

▪ Fasting practices.

In some Indian astrological and ritual traditions, particular foods and colors are symbolically associated with specific *grahas*. Jupiter (Brihaspati/Guru), for example, is traditionally associated with the color yellow, and contemporary descriptions of Brihaspati worship mention yellow-colored foods, chickpea or gram preparations, yellow sweets, fruits, and, in some traditions, curd-rice as offerings (*naivedya* or *bhog*) (Rajendran, 2023a) ^[19]. Similarly, Venus (Shukra) is commonly associated with white and, in some traditions, yellow symbolism; contemporary ritual descriptions identify cooked rice mixed with ghee, rice-based sweets, white beans, sugar, and white-colored fruits among foods offered to Shukra (Rajendran, 2023b) ^[20]. These associations illustrate the symbolic relationship between color, food, planetary identity, and ritual practice rather than demonstrating a physiological effect of planets on food or human nutrition. Such correspondences should therefore be interpreted within their religious and cultural context rather than as evidence-based dietary prescriptions.

Food may also function as *naivedya* or *bhog*, whereby particular preparations are ritually offered to a deity or planetary entity before being distributed or consumed as *prasada*. In this context, foods such as yellow preparations for Brihaspati or rice- and ghee-based preparations for Shukra acquire meanings that extend beyond their nutritional composition. The practice demonstrates how ordinary agricultural commodities can be transformed into ritual substances and cultural symbols through religious practice. Importantly, the precise food offerings associated with individual *grahas* are not completely uniform across Indian traditions, and contemporary descriptions may differ according to region, sectarian practice, household tradition, and ritual text. Consequently, these food–planet associations should be presented as traditional or culturally documented correspondences, rather than universal classifications or scientifically demonstrated relationships.

Navadhanya: Where Agriculture Meets Astrology

One of the most interesting examples of the food–astrology relationship is **Navadhanya**, the symbolic use of nine grains representing the Navagraha.

Table 1: Illustrative association between Navagraha and traditional food grains

Graha	Traditional name	Common symbolic food association*	Cultural symbolism
Sun	Surya	Wheat	Strength, vitality, authority
Moon	Chandra	Rice	Nourishment, fertility, emotionality
Mars	Mangala	Chickpea/red pulse traditions	Energy, courage
Mercury	Budha	Green gram	Intellect, communication
Jupiter	Guru/Brihaspati	Chickpea/yellow gram traditions	Knowledge, prosperity
Venus	Shukra	Rice/white grains	Beauty, pleasure, abundance
Saturn	Shani	Black sesame/black gram traditions	Discipline, endurance
Rahu	Rahu	Black gram or mixed grain traditions	Transformation, ambiguity
Ketu	Ketu	Horse gram or mixed grain traditions	Detachment, spirituality

*Associations vary among regional and ritual traditions and should not be interpreted as universally standardized.

The importance of Navadhanya extends beyond its astrological and ritual significance because the grains and pulses associated with the tradition represent food crops that have historically contributed to dietary diversity in South Asia. Cereals, pulses, and oilseeds constitute important components of Indian food systems, and the diversity of cereal- and pulse-based foods reflects the country's regional agricultural and dietary variation (Green *et al.*, 2016) ^[9]. Pulses, in particular, have long been important components of Indian diets because they provide protein, dietary fibre, minerals, and other bioactive constituents (Mudgil & Barak, 2019; Singh *et al.*, 2022) ^[15, 25]. Thus, the incorporation of multiple grains and pulses within a ritual framework provides an interesting example of how agricultural resources and food biodiversity can acquire additional religious and symbolic meanings. However, it would be inappropriate to assume that the ritual use of Navadhanya was historically intended specifically as a strategy for improving nutritional diversity; the nutritional interpretation is a contemporary food-science perspective rather than an established explanation for the origin of the practice. From a food-science perspective, cereals and pulses contribute complementary nutritional components to the diet. Cereals are important sources of carbohydrates and also contribute plant protein, dietary fibre, vitamins, minerals, and other phytochemicals, whereas pulses are particularly valuable sources of protein, dietary fibre, minerals, and bioactive compounds (Mudgil & Barak, 2019)

^[15]. Combining cereals with pulses can also improve the overall amino-acid balance of plant-based diets because their protein profiles are complementary (Singh *et al.*, 2019) ^[26]. The nutritional characteristics of these foods, however, are determined by their chemical composition, variety, processing, preparation, and consumption pattern, rather than by their astrological classification. Therefore, while Navadhanya provides a valuable example of the interaction between food, agriculture, religion, and cultural symbolism, claims concerning its nutritional effects should be evaluated independently using established principles of food science and nutrition.

Ayurveda as a Bridge Between Food and Cosmic Thought

The relationship between astrology and food in India cannot be fully discussed without considering Ayurveda, the traditional system of medicine that developed in the Indian subcontinent. Ayurvedic dietary thought provides a comprehensive traditional framework in which foods are evaluated according to multiple attributes, including *rasa* (taste), *guna* (qualities), *virya* (potency), *vipaka* (post-digestive effect), and their perceived effects on the *doshas* and individual constitution (*prakriti*) (Mukherjee *et al.*, 2016) ^[16]. Classical Ayurvedic literature contains extensive descriptions of foods and beverages, including their sensory characteristics, qualities, compatibility, appropriate quantities, methods of preparation, timing of consumption,

and suitability according to individual digestive capacity and physiological constitution.

Within this framework, *rasa* is traditionally classified into six tastes—sweet (*madhura*), sour (*amla*), salty (*lavana*), pungent (*katu*), bitter (*tikta*), and astringent (*kashaya*)—while *guna*, *virya*, and *vipaka* provide additional categories for describing the properties and perceived effects of foods and other substances (Mukherjee *et al.*, 2016; Patwardhan *et al.*, 2015) ^[11, 16]. Ayurvedic dietary principles also recognize the importance of time, season, digestive capacity, and individual constitution in determining appropriate food choices. The concept of *ritucharya*, for example, describes seasonal adjustments in diet and lifestyle intended to maintain physiological balance as environmental conditions change (Sengupta *et al.*, 2012) ^[23].

This framework is particularly relevant to the present discussion because both Ayurveda and Jyotisha developed within broader Indian intellectual and cultural traditions in which human health, nature, time, seasonality, and cosmological ideas were interconnected. However, Ayurvedic dietary concepts and astrological food associations should not be treated as identical systems. Ayurveda primarily provides a traditional framework for understanding food, digestion, constitution, and health, whereas Jyotisha concerns celestial cycles, planetary symbolism, calendrical calculations, and auspicious timing. Their intersection is therefore better understood as part of a wider cultural system in which food may simultaneously possess nutritional, medicinal, ritual, seasonal, and symbolic meanings. Contemporary scientific research can investigate individual dietary practices and their physiological effects, but traditional Ayurvedic or astrological classifications should not automatically be interpreted as scientifically established mechanisms.

Ayurveda classifies foods through several concepts, including:

- *Rasa* – taste,
- *Guna* – qualities,
- *Virya* – potency,
- *Vipaka* – post-digestive effect,
- *Agni* – digestive/metabolic capacity,
- *Dosha* – Vata, Pitta and Kapha,
- *Prakriti* – individual constitution.

Ayurvedic dietary theory recognizes six principal tastes (*ṣaḍ-rasa*): *madhura* (sweet), *amla* (sour), *lavana* (salty), *katu* (pungent), *tikta* (bitter), and *kaṣāya* (astringent). In classical Ayurvedic thought, taste is not merely a sensory characteristic but is considered an important property for describing foods and understanding their traditional effects on digestion, physiology, and the *doṣas* (Vasant & Gupta, 2011; Mukherjee *et al.*, 2016) ^[16, 30]. This classification therefore provides a traditional method of organizing foods that extends beyond their macronutrient composition and incorporates sensory qualities, perceived physiological effects, and dietary suitability. Modern scholarship has noted that Ayurvedic food classification represents a complex traditional knowledge system in which food properties are interpreted through multiple interconnected concepts rather than through nutrient composition alone (Dhanya & Ramesh, 2019) ^[5].

Although Ayurvedic food traditions and astrological interpretations may overlap within broader Indian

cosmological and cultural frameworks, the two systems should not be regarded as identical. Ayurveda primarily constitutes a traditional health system concerned with diet, digestion, constitution (*prakriti*), *dosha* balance, food properties, and lifestyle, whereas Jyotisha is principally concerned with celestial bodies, planetary symbolism, calendrical calculations, auspicious timing, and interpretations of human affairs (Patwardhan *et al.*, 2015 ^[18]; Bühnenmann, 1989). Their intersection occurs particularly in traditional practices where food, season, ritual timing, religious observance, and cosmological symbolism are considered together. From a scholarly perspective, it is therefore more appropriate to describe Ayurveda and Jyotisha as related but distinct knowledge traditions, whose interactions have contributed to the cultural meanings attributed to food in India.

Sattvic, Rajasic and Tamasic Foods

Another important connection between Indian food culture and spirituality is the traditional classification of food according to the three *gunas*—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. The concept is particularly articulated in *Bhagavad Gita* Chapter 17, where foods are discussed in relation to the qualities of mind and their perceived influence on physical and mental states. Later Ayurvedic and yogic interpretations further developed these concepts into dietary classifications (Dhanya & Ramesh, 2019; Ross *et al.*, 2015) ^[5, 21]. Importantly, the *guna* classification is a philosophical and traditional framework, rather than a modern scientific system of food classification.

1. Sattvic Foods

Sattvic foods are traditionally associated with purity, nourishment, vitality, mental clarity, contentment, moderation, and spiritual discipline. In Ayurvedic and yogic interpretations, foods considered *sattvic* are generally fresh, wholesome, relatively simple, and easy to digest. Commonly described examples include fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, milk and selected dairy products, and freshly prepared meals (Dhanya & Ramesh, 2019; Ross *et al.*, 2015) ^[5, 21]. The *Bhagavad Gita* describes foods associated with *sattva* as nourishing, pleasing, sustaining, and conducive to longevity and well-being (Bhagavad Gita 17.8).

2. Rajasic Foods

Rajasic foods are traditionally associated with stimulation, intensity, activity, passion, and sensory excitation. Classical descriptions characterize foods associated with *rajas* as strongly pungent, sour, salty, hot, dry, or otherwise stimulating. Contemporary Ayurvedic interpretations commonly include highly spicy foods, pickles, and foods with strong flavors within this category, although the exact classification may differ among traditions (Dhanya & Ramesh, 2019; Ross *et al.*, 2015) ^[5, 21]. The *Bhagavad Gita* describes foods associated with *rajas* as excessively bitter, sour, salty, hot, pungent, dry, or burning and links their consumption, within its philosophical framework, with discomfort and agitation (Bhagavad Gita 17.9).

3. Tamasic Foods

Tamasic foods are traditionally associated with inertia, heaviness, dullness, and reduced mental clarity. Classical descriptions emphasize food that is stale, overcooked,

decomposed, impure, or unsuitable for consumption, while later Ayurvedic and yogic interpretations may extend the category to certain heavily processed, reheated, or excessively preserved foods (Dhanya & Ramesh, 2019; Ross *et al.*, 2015)^[5, 21]. In *Bhagavad Gita* 17.10, foods that are stale, decomposed, tasteless, or considered impure are described as being associated with *tamas*.

These three categories should not be directly equated with modern nutritional classifications such as “healthy” and “unhealthy.” They represent a traditional philosophical framework concerned partly with perceived effects of food on consciousness, behavior, and spiritual practice. Some foods classified as *sattvic* may have favorable nutritional characteristics—for example, fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, and whole grains can contribute dietary fibre, micronutrients, and phytochemicals—but these nutritional properties arise from their measurable chemical composition rather than from the *guna* classification itself. Conversely, classification as *rajasic* or *tamasic* does not by itself establish that a food is nutritionally harmful.

Nevertheless, the *sattvic-rajasic-tamasic* framework has considerable cultural importance because it can influence food selection, meal preparation, fasting, religious observance, and spiritual practices. Thus, the framework provides another example of how Indian food tradition integrate physiological, psychological, ethical, religious, and spiritual meanings. From the perspective of the present review, these classifications are particularly relevant because they demonstrate that food choices in Indian traditions may be influenced not only by nutritional requirements but also by broader concepts of purity, consciousness, self-discipline, ritual practice, and spiritual well-being.

Fasting: The Most Visible Connection Between Faith and Food

Fasting is perhaps the clearest example of how religious belief influences dietary behavior in India. Fasting may occur during:

- Ekadashi,
- Navratri,
- Shivaratri,
- Janmashtami,
- Shravan,
- Chaturmas,
- Karva Chauth,
- Regional religious festivals,
- Individual devotional practices.

Fasting practices vary enormously. Some involve complete abstinence from food, whereas others permit fruits, milk, nuts, roots, tubers, selected grains or specially prepared foods.

Religious fasting in India should not automatically be equated with **modern intermittent fasting (IF)** because the two practices differ in their underlying objectives, duration, dietary rules, social context, and behavioral patterns. Religious fasting is often undertaken for spiritual purification, devotional commitment, ritual observance, or religious discipline, whereas intermittent fasting is generally defined in nutritional and biomedical research according to predetermined periods of eating and fasting. Furthermore, religious fasting practices are highly heterogeneous: some traditions involve complete abstinence from food and/or

fluids, whereas others permit selected foods such as fruits, milk, nuts, tubers, or specific grains and exclude particular food groups. Consequently, the nutritional and metabolic effects of one religious fasting practice cannot necessarily be generalized to other forms of fasting (Trepanowski *et al.*, 2017; Patterson & Sears, 2017)^[17, 29].

Evidence regarding the health effects of religious fasting remains comparatively limited and heterogeneous. A systematic review of Orthodox religious fasting, for example, reported potentially favorable effects on selected cardiometabolic parameters but emphasized substantial variation among fasting practices and the need for additional well-designed studies to establish long-term health effects (Karras *et al.*, 2017)^[10]. Similarly, studies of Ramadan fasting demonstrate that fasting-related changes in body weight, glucose metabolism, lipid profile, and dietary intake can vary according to the duration of fasting, food composition, meal timing, physical activity, sleep, and cultural context (Faris *et al.*, 2020)^[6]. These findings indicate that the physiological consequences of fasting depend not only on the fasting interval but also on what, when, and how much food is consumed during non-fasting periods.

Nevertheless, certain traditional fasting practices may produce dietary changes that are nutritionally relevant. Depending on the specific religious tradition, fasting may temporarily reduce consumption of meat and other animal-source foods while increasing reliance on fruits, selected vegetables, nuts, seeds, milk products, roots and tubers. Some practices may also result in a temporary reduction in overall energy intake, whereas others may maintain or even increase energy intake through calorie-dense foods such as fried preparations, sweets, nuts, and dairy products. Therefore, the nutritional consequences of religious fasting cannot be assumed solely from the word *fasting*. They should be evaluated according to the specific fasting protocol, food composition, meal frequency, portion size, duration, and individual's nutritional status.

From the perspective of food and nutrition research, religious fasting therefore represents an important behavioral and cultural determinant of dietary intake. Its potential nutritional and metabolic effects should be investigated independently of its religious meaning, using validated dietary assessment methods, anthropometric measurements, biochemical markers, and appropriate comparison groups. Such an approach can respect the cultural and spiritual significance of fasting while allowing its nutritional implications to be examined using evidence-based scientific methods.

Festival Foods and Celestial Calendars

Indian festivals are strongly connected with lunar and solar calendars. Because many religious festivals are determined by *tithi*, *nakshatra*, lunar phases, or other calendrical calculations, food preparation often becomes synchronized with particular ritual dates (Sanford, 2004)^[22].

Examples include

- **Makar Sankranti:** sesame, jaggery and region-specific preparations;
- **Janmashtami:** milk-based foods, fruits and fasting foods;
- **Navratri:** fruit, tubers, buckwheat, amaranth and selected fasting preparations;

- **Diwali:** sweets, nuts, fried snacks and festive preparations;
- **Pongal:** rice, milk and jaggery-based preparations;
- **Onam:** elaborate vegetarian *sadya*;
- **Mahashivratri:** fasting-oriented foods and fruits;
- **Ekadashi:** restricted consumption of grains in many traditions.

The celestial calendar therefore indirectly influences culinary activity by determining when particular foods are prepared, avoided, offered, or shared (Kobayashi, 2025).

This is an important distinction: the stars and planets do not need to be demonstrated as physiologically altering food in order for celestial calendars to influence food culture. Their influence can occur through human behavior mediated by belief and ritual.

Kobayashi, F. (2025). Ritual Symbolism and Culinary Practice in Winter Solstice Folklore: A Comparative Study in East Asia. *Journal of Contemporary Rituals and Traditions*, 3(1), 1-20.

Astrology, Food Offerings and Religious Hospitality

Food offered to a deity is commonly described as *naivedya* or *bhog*. Following ritual offering, the food may be distributed as *prasada*. In this transformation, food moves through several symbolic stages:

Agricultural production → Food preparation → Ritual offering → Sacred transformation → Community consumption

Food in Indian religious traditions can simultaneously function as a biological resource, culinary product, ritual substance, and social medium. Its significance is therefore determined not only by its nutritional composition but also by the context in which it is prepared, offered, distributed, and consumed. Anthropological perspectives on food emphasize that eating practices communicate cultural identity, social relationships, religious values, and systems of meaning (Mintz & Du Bois, 2002) ^[14]. Within Hindu traditions, food offered to a deity as *naivedya* or *bhog* may subsequently be distributed as *prasada*, thereby acquiring a sacred status through the ritual process. Studies of Hindu food practices have consequently highlighted the importance of food offerings and *prasada* in understanding relationships between ritual, devotion, community, and religious identity (Babb, 1970; Fuller, 1992) ^[2, 7].

Planetary worship provides another context in which food can function as an offering medium. Traditional *Navagraha* ritual practices associate particular offerings, grains, colors, flowers, and other substances with individual *grahas*. The ritual use of these materials reflects the broader Hindu practice of representing and engaging with celestial deities through material substances (Bühnenmann, 1989). In this context, food ingredients can become part of a symbolic vocabulary of devotion, in which their color, form, taste, agricultural identity, or traditional association contributes to their ritual significance. Importantly, these associations represent culturally transmitted religious practices and should not be interpreted as evidence that planetary bodies exert scientifically established physiological effects through the consumption of particular foods.

The concept is particularly significant from a food-anthropological perspective, because the meaning of food is context-dependent. The same rice preparation, for example,

may function as an everyday staple in one setting, a ceremonial or festival food in another, an offering to a deity during worship, or *prasada* when distributed after ritual offering. Thus, the physical food may remain essentially similar while its social, religious, and symbolic meaning changes according to the context of preparation and consumption (Mintz & Du Bois, 2002; Fuller, 1992) ^[7, 14]. This illustrates that food in Indian culture cannot be understood solely through its nutrient composition; it also operates as a medium through which devotion, identity, social relationships, ritual exchange, and cultural memory are expressed.

Regional Diversity: There Is No Single "Astrological Indian Cuisine"

India's culinary diversity makes it inappropriate to describe a single national system of food astrology.

Food practices vary according to:

- Region,
- Language,
- Religious tradition,
- Caste/community,
- Agricultural availability,
- Climate,
- Season,
- Socioeconomic status,
- Household custom,
- Individual belief.

Research on Indian vegetarianism similarly demonstrates substantial variation by religion and region rather than a uniform national dietary pattern.

For example, fasting foods in northern India may emphasize buckwheat (*kuttu*), amaranth (*rajgira*) and potatoes, while southern traditions may use different ingredients and preparations. Bengal, Odisha, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Punjab and the northeastern states each possess distinct food cultures shaped by local ecology and history.

Therefore, astrology should be studied as one layer within a complex food-cultural system, not as a universal explanation for Indian cuisine (Fuller, 1992) ^[7].

Food, Astrology and Social Identity

Food practices communicate social identity. Dietary restrictions can indicate religious affiliation, family tradition, festival participation or personal spirituality.

Astrological food practices may similarly function as identity markers. Individuals may select foods according to:

- Birth chart interpretations,
- Weekday associations,
- Planetary remedies,
- Fasting schedules,
- Religious observance,
- Family traditions,
- Auspicious occasions.

The psychological and social significance of such practices can be considerable even when their proposed planetary mechanism lacks scientific validation.

Thus, an important research question is not simply:

"Does the planet influence the food?"

but rather:

"How does belief in planetary influence change what people buy, cook, eat, avoid and offer?"

This behavioral perspective provides a more scientifically testable framework.

Scientific Perspective: What Is Established and What Is Not?

A major challenge in reviewing food and astrology is separating cultural knowledge from experimentally validated biological claims.

Astrological systems propose relationships between the positions and movements of celestial bodies and human characteristics, behavior, personality, or life outcomes. However, these proposed relationships have not been consistently supported by controlled empirical research. A frequently cited investigation by Carlson (1985) ^[4], published in *Nature*, used a double-blind experimental design to test whether astrologers could accurately match individuals with personality profiles using their natal charts. The study conducted two tests of the proposition that astrological natal charts could provide accurate descriptions of personality traits.

Carlson's study is particularly relevant because it attempted to evaluate astrological claims under controlled conditions rather than relying on anecdotal observations. The findings did not provide support for the tested claim that natal astrology could reliably describe personality characteristics. This finding does not, by itself, address every form of astrological practice or every cultural interpretation of astrology; rather, it provides evidence against the specific predictive claims tested in the study.

For the present review, this distinction is important. The cultural influence of astrology on food practices can be studied independently of whether astrological predictions are scientifically valid. For example, beliefs concerning planetary associations with particular grains, colors, fasting practices, or ritual foods may influence food selection and consumption through cultural and religious mechanisms. Consequently, the scientific study of *food and astrology* need not attempt to establish planetary causation. Instead, it can examine how astrological beliefs function as cultural determinants of dietary behavior, ritual practice, food symbolism, and culinary identity.

Potential Nutritional Interpretations of Traditional Food Practices

Some traditional practices may have nutritional consequences that are independent of astrology.

For example:

1. Increased dietary diversity

Traditional festival meals often contain cereals, pulses, vegetables, fruits, dairy products, nuts and seeds. Dietary diversity can improve exposure to different nutrients and phytochemicals.

2. Use of pulses and grains

The Navadhanya concept brings attention to a broad range of cereals, pulses and oilseeds. These foods can provide protein, dietary fibre, minerals and bioactive compounds (Ashwani, 2025) ^[1].

3. Seasonal eating

Many Indian festivals occur at particular times of the agricultural calendar, encouraging consumption of seasonal ingredients.

4. Reduced intake during fasting

Some fasting practices reduce total energy intake, although the actual effect depends on the foods consumed during the non-fasting period.

5. Mindful eating

Religious food practices may encourage controlled portions, deliberate food selection, ritual preparation and avoidance of excessive consumption.

These possible nutritional advantages should be evaluated using conventional nutritional science rather than attributed automatically to planetary forces (Ashwani, 2025) ^[1].

6. Food Safety and Traditional Ritual Practices

Traditional food practices also have implications for food safety. Ritual food preparation may involve:

- Large-scale cooking,
- Prolonged holding at ambient temperatures,
- Community distribution,
- Repeated handling,
- Offering food in temples,
- Preparation of milk-based sweets,
- Storage of cooked foods.

Although religious significance can encourage careful preparation, ritual importance does not guarantee microbiological safety.

Modern food-safety principles—such as temperature control, hygienic handling, safe water, prevention of cross-contamination and appropriate storage—remain essential.

Modernization and the Commercialization of Food Astrology

Digital media have expanded access to astrological dietary advice. Social media, astrology websites, mobile applications and online consultations increasingly provide individualized recommendations involving:

- Zodiac-based foods,
- Planetary remedies,
- Fasting plans,
- Colored foods,
- Food substitutions,
- Personalized ritual diets.

This commercialization creates both opportunities and risks. On one hand, digital platforms can preserve traditional food knowledge and introduce younger generations to culinary heritage. On the other hand, unverified claims may present astrological recommendations as medical or nutritional facts.

Consequently, digital food astrology should clearly distinguish:

Traditional belief → Cultural recommendation → Nutritional evidence → Medical advice

These are four different categories and should not be conflated.

Conclusion

The relationship between food, faith and the stars represents a fascinating but underexplored dimension of Indian food culture. Indian cuisine has historically developed through interactions among agriculture, geography, Ayurveda, religion, social customs, seasonal cycles and ritual practices. Within this complex system, Jyotisha contributes a symbolic framework in which planets, lunar cycles, *nakshatras*, weekdays and auspicious timings may influence food offerings, fasting, ingredient selection and ceremonial meals. Navadhanya, Navagraha offerings, fasting foods, festival cuisine and planetary food symbolism illustrate how food can become a medium through which cosmic ideas are expressed in everyday life. At the same time, these traditions should not be interpreted as evidence that planetary positions directly determine nutritional requirements or physiological outcomes. Current scientific evidence does not establish reliable causal mechanisms linking astrological configurations with human nutritional needs. The most productive contemporary interpretation is therefore interdisciplinary: astrology can be studied as a cultural and behavioral influence on food choice, while Ayurveda can be examined as a historical dietary knowledge system and modern nutrition can provide the evidence base for health-related conclusions. Such an approach respects India's culinary and spiritual heritage while maintaining scientific rigor. Ultimately, Indian food demonstrates that nourishment is not only biological—it is also symbolic, social, ecological and spiritual. The study of food, faith and the stars therefore provides a valuable window into how societies transform ingredients into meaning.

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